

*Citation for published version:*

Phoenix, C & Orr, N 2014, 'Pleasure: A forgotten dimension of physical activity in older age', *Social Science and Medicine*, vol. 115, pp. 94-102. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2014.06.013>

*DOI:*

[10.1016/j.socscimed.2014.06.013](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2014.06.013)

*Publication date:*

2014

*Document Version*

Early version, also known as pre-print

[Link to publication](#)

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# Accepted Manuscript

Pleasure: A Forgotten Dimension of Physical Activity in Older Age

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PII: S0277-9536(14)00372-4

DOI: [10.1016/j.socscimed.2014.06.013](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2014.06.013)

Reference: SSM 9522

To appear in: *Social Science & Medicine*

Received Date: 4 April 2013

Revised Date: 6 June 2014

Accepted Date: 10 June 2014



Please cite this article as: Phoenix, C., Orr, N., Pleasure: A Forgotten Dimension of Physical Activity in Older Age, *Social Science & Medicine* (2014), doi: 10.1016/j.socscimed.2014.06.013.

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### **Acknowledgements**

This work was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (RES-061-30-000551)

The European Centre for Environment and Human Health (part of the University of Exeter Medical School) is part financed by the European Regional Development Fund Programme 2007 to 2013 and European Social Fund Convergence Programme for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly.

Our thanks go to Brett Smith and the anonymous reviewers for their constructive comments on this piece.

## Pleasure: A Forgotten Dimension of Physical Activity in Older Age

### Abstract

Pleasure is an under-researched and under theorized concept within health and health-related areas, particularly in relation to physical activity in older age. This gap is addressed here. The paper forms part of a larger qualitative project conducted between March 2011 and July 2013 within which fifty-one physically active older adults (age sixty to ninety-two years) were interviewed about their experiences of physical activity. Twenty-seven of these participants were also involved in a photo elicitation exercise whereby they responded to photographic images of themselves doing their activity. The paper reports in-depth on one of the themes – pleasure – that was initially identified through a rigorous categorical-content analysis of this data. An original typology of pleasure for physical activity in older age is developed, which details four significant ideal types of pleasure: sensual pleasure; documented pleasure; the pleasure of habitual action; and the pleasure of immersion. The implications of this typology for debates around embodiment, affect, and narratives of ageing are discussed in relation to health promotion and future research in this underserved area.

**Keywords:** United Kingdom, Pleasure, Aging, Physical Activity, Embodiment, Affect.

### Introduction

Pleasure is an under-researched and under theorized concept within health and health-related areas (Coveney & Bunton, 2003). Understanding pleasure relative to health is important for a number of reasons. First, Coveney and Bunton (2003) point out how “pleasure might be considered a motive for human action (or indeed inaction) and is integral to understanding how humans interact with each other and their environment in ways that promote health or create disease” (p. 163). Second, experiences of enjoyment and pleasure are a central argument for maintaining people’s habit health behaviors (Crossley, 2006). Jallinoja, Pajari and Absetz (2010) further elaborate on this by arguing that to date, too many health promotion initiatives have targeted health behavior with the assumption that it is cognitive forces alone that govern behaviour. This assumption, they assert, overlooks the ‘reality’ that motives and actions are intertwined with experiences of pleasure. Accordingly, regardless of how self-disciplined individuals might be, these authors propose that the dilemma of pleasure and health must be disentangled if lifestyle changes resulting from health interventions are to be anything other than short-lived. Third, much of the research in this area has focused on the risky, negative and destructive health consequences of pleasure seeking activities. This includes some sexual encounters (Crossley, 2010), illegal drug use (Newbury-Birch, White & Kamali, 2000) and (over)eating (Mela, 2006). In these contexts, pleasure seeking can form part of a reasoned, rationalized act of resistance against authority, including health promoters (Whitehead, 2005). This research has made an important contribution to our understanding of pleasure and health behaviours. However, it overlooks scenarios where pleasure seeking might *contribute to*, rather than *threaten* health. One example of this being participation in sport and physical activity.

In recent years, a number of scholars have critiqued what they see as an overarching neglect of analytic interest regarding the relationship between pleasure, health

and physical activity from the perspectives of (physical) cultural studies and sociology. Booth (2009), for example, bemoans the somewhat “deafening silence” surrounding the subject of pleasure in relation to human movement (p. 133). Throughout modernity, he argues, forms of physical pleasures that awakened enjoyment, pride, and undisciplined impulses were condemned and devotees of physical activity came to justify their practices on the basis of external factors, including health preparation for war. Such politics of pleasure have resulted in a “prejudice against pleasure in the academy and in state policy” (p. 133). This continues to be reflected in dominant narratives circulating within the sub-cultures of sport, fitness and health, which promote instrumental over sensuous kinds of pleasure, with performance and / or health outcomes taking precedent (Smith Maguire, 2008). Wellard (2012) has also critiqued the way in which considerations of bodily pleasure have been largely ignored within human movement studies in favour of developing health related measures.

Within the small amount of research that *has* involved an interest in pleasure and human movement, the focus has been on the high level, performance driven sporting body. One example is Monaghan’s (2001) ethnography of a bodybuilding sub-culture in South Wales, UK. Concerned with the so-called “erotics of the gym”, Monaghan explored the bodily pleasures associated with anaerobic exercise, commonly referred to within the bodybuilding fraternity as “the pump” (p. 345). Pringle’s (2009) Foucauldian analysis of discipline and pleasure in men’s rugby offers a second example. His research illustrated the way in which technologies of dominance and self can transport rugby players to a potentially addictive ‘edge’ where boundaries between pleasure and pain, confidence and fear, wellbeing and injury must be negotiated. Finally, Throsby’s (2013) (auto)ethnographic research on marathon swimming draws attention to the unexpected pleasures of this somewhat grueling activity. Her research illustrates how the process of intensive training

changes how the body feels in water, to the extent that (marathon) swimming becomes a pleasure in and of itself. These studies collectively reinforce the importance of examining pleasure within a physical context by showing how affect can become a productive force in the constitution of people's desire and adherence towards activity. The studies also implicitly point to the multiple relations of pleasure and indeed displeasure (e.g., pain) that can shape bodies and identities over time. However, for the value of pleasure within this context to be fully realized, analyses must also incorporate physical activity in its broadest sense, rather than merely the sporting 'spectacular'. This paper responds to this need by examining the experiences of pleasure in relation to physical activity.

One group for whom engagement in regular physical activity is consistently promoted within health policy is older adults (e.g., Active Ageing Policy Framework, WHO 2002; The *Lancet* series on physical activity, July 2012). Indeed, to complement and, where appropriate, facilitate the implementation of 'top down' policy recommendations regarding physical activity in older age, there is a need to develop detailed insight into the subjective experiences of what it means to be physically active during this life stage (Phoenix & Grant, 2009). A growing body of qualitative research has made much progress in this regard (e.g., Dumas & Laberge, 2005; Griffin, 2010; Griffin & Phoenix, in press; Kluge, 2002; Phoenix & Smith, 2011; Phoenix & Sparkes, 2009; Tulle & Dorrer, 2012; Wandel & Roos, 2006). However, once again, within this body of research, the subject of pleasure remains conspicuously absent. Against this backdrop, the purpose of this paper is to develop empirical and theoretical knowledge of pleasure within the context of later life physical activity. In doing so, it makes an original and significant contribution to understandings of pleasure in relation to health and health-related areas.

## Methodology and Methods

This paper contributes to the overall findings of our larger funded research project, which examined the impact of physical activity on people's perceptions and experiences of (self-)ageing between March 2011 and July 2013. The research was conducted in the South West of the United Kingdom where we both live and work. It was structured using two linear yet complementing studies. Study one focused on the meaning and experiences of physical activity for older adults who exercise on a regular basis. Study two was concerned with how other people at various stages in the life course *respond to* such accounts. This paper is based upon findings from study one only. It is framed by the interpretive paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 2005) and a narrative social constructionist approach (Sparkes & Smith, 2008).

We used criterion sampling to identify our participants (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Our inclusion criteria stated that participants needed to be age 60 years or over and self-identify as exercising on a regular basis. We sought diversity within the sample regarding age group, activity type and equal numbers of males and females (see Table 1).

INSERT TABLE 1 APPROXIMATELY HERE

After receiving approval from the former Peninsula College of Medicine and Dentistry Research Ethics Committee (which disbanded on August 1<sup>st</sup> 2012 to form University of Exeter Medical School [author institution] and Plymouth Peninsula Medical School), we recruited 51 participants (M = 23; F = 28) who (it transpired through the data collection), while self-defined as regularly physically active also spanned a range of health conditions



including chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, heart disease, arthritis, diabetes, cancer, Parkinson's disease, depression and anxiety. They were recruited using a variety of means including: displaying posters about the project in public spaces (e.g., libraries, leisure centres); approaching naturally occurring interest groups for this age group (e.g., University of the Third Age, lunch clubs). In addition, the use of snowball sampling enabled us to identify cases of interest known to some of the early participants. Finally, we recruited a small number of participants through opportunistic sampling (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). This involved taking advantage of the unexpected. For example, one participant asked to join the study after sitting next to [second author] on a domestic flight where the conversation turned to what each did for a living. Those who expressed an interest in the project were provided with information sheets outlining the purpose of the research, the nature of their involvement (should they agree to participate) and details of any ethical issues. Informed consent forms were then circulated and discussed prior to commencing each interview.

We used life history interviews, (researcher produced) photography, and a photo elicitation exercise to generate data. This strategy responds to recent calls for methodological pluralism within qualitative research as a means of investigating complex social issues (Chamberlain, Cain, Sheridan & Dupuis, 2011). The life history interviews took place with all of the participants between October 2011 and March 2012. Here, [second author] adopted the position of 'active listener' to assist participants to tell their life story and the meaning of physical activity throughout their life, in their own way and in their own words (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). Each interview lasted between 1.5 - 2.5 hours, was digitally recorded, downloaded and transcribed verbatim. We also invited the participants to take part in a follow-up phase involving visual methods (Banks, 2007; Phoenix, 2010). The purpose of this phase was to create photographic images of the participants doing their activity as a means of eliciting further discussion about their body in motion. Thirty-four of

our participants agreed to be involved in this phase of the research. Of these, we photographed twenty-seven. It was not possible to capture the remaining seven due to subsequent illness, injury, and the reluctance of some class instructors to allow the research team to photograph their session.

The textual data (i.e., transcripts, written responses to photographs) were subjected to multiple forms of analyses. Using multiple forms of analyses can enable researchers to understand qualitative data in different ways (see Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Sparkes & Smith, 2014; Phoenix, Smith & Sparkes, 2010), thereby going some way towards acknowledging and accommodating the complexity of subjectivities surrounding physical activity and older age. We began with a categorical-content analysis (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber, 1998). This type of analysis focuses on the *whats* of storytelling by scrutinizing stories for central themes. It began with us adopting the posture of indwelling as the transcripts were read and re-read. Subtexts were then selected, content categories were defined, material was sorted into categories, and conclusions were drawn from the results. Throughout this analytical process, we worked in tandem, acting as ‘critical friends’ and theoretical sounding boards to encourage further exploration of, and reflexivity upon alternative explanations and interpretations as they emerged in relation to the data. A number of central themes were identified including (but not restricted to): relationships, retirement, care, widowhood, luck, spirituality, and stigma. In this paper, however, we focus on just *one* of the themes emerging from this analysis: Pleasure. This theme was defined as being the diverse emotions that make a person ‘feel good’, including “happiness, joy, fun, sensuality, amusement, mirth, tranquility” (Smith, 1980. p. 75).

Having identified pleasure as a key theme, our analytical attention turned to the practical organization and meaning of how pleasure was encountered through experiences of physical activity. This involved asking questions in relation to the *what* and *where* of

social context (Holstein & Gubrium, 2004; Phoenix & Howe, 2010). For Holstein and Gubrium (2004), such collective questions might allow researchers to broaden their knowledge of context by facilitating ways of working *across* social settings and rendering visible the ways in which alternative forms of meaning making can be accomplished. The variations that came to the fore as a result of this enabled us to develop a typology of ideal types of pleasure. Ideal types are constructs that use a description of a phenomenon in its abstract form. They do not exist in pure form (Holloway, 1997). Accordingly, the types of pleasure outlined in our typology are of narratives, not people. No individual is reduced to a singular narrative type. Rather, they operate within these types, which act as resources for telling and expectations for hearing (Frank, 2010). Typologies (of ideal types) are useful because they can assist researchers to compare and classify phenomenon. As Frank (1995) notes, “the “really real” does not exist in order to be theorized. But theory is still useful in approaching the bewildering particularity of that really real” (p. 29). Thus, the ideal types presented here provide a reflexive medium and language for discussing what is particular in ‘real’ physically active older bodies.

In terms of judging the quality of this work, the research was guided by a variety of criteria as assembled in Tracy’s (2010) review of what constitutes “excellent qualitative work” (p. 837). These criteria included, the *worthiness of the topic*, *resonance*, the *significant contribution* of the work, and *rich rigor* (e.g., weaving together appropriate concepts and theories). The analysis used an audit trail to enhance *transparency* (e.g., a colleague independently scrutinized data collection and theoretical matters). Another way that transparency was sought was through self-reflexivity. For example, as two Caucasian females significantly younger than our participants we were aware from the outset that our own embodiment would influence data collection processes and interpretations of the data. This is not something that can be transcended because theory free knowledge is

unobtainable (Sparkes & Smith, 2014): we cannot step outside our own embodied history, culture, and so on. That said, via discussions, reflexive journals and regular meetings with our advisory board throughout the project, we were self-reflexive about our subjective values and inclinations in relation to the research. Finally, *credibility* was sought through participant reflections on the researcher's interpretations of the data. This took the form of a participant workshop held in May 2012. Participant reflections are, however, less a *test* of research findings and instead opportunities for dialogue on the believability of interpretations. These in turn can provide a spur for richer and deeper analyses.

### **Constructing a Typology of Pleasure for Physical Activity in Older Age**

Our deeper analysis into the theme of 'pleasure' identified four distinct types regarding how, where, and when our participants experienced it. They were; sensual pleasures, documented pleasures, the pleasure of habitual action, and the pleasure of immersion. For heuristic purposes, the characteristics of each type are described separately below. Examples of pleasure 'in action' are also presented to show how each is produced through the everyday experiences of older people as they negotiate different constructions of ageing embodiment.

#### ***Sensual Pleasures***

While acknowledging our interest in the sensory dimension of physical activity that weaved through this research (including the methods), our analysis illuminated how one way or another, most of the participants when talking about their senses did so in ways that connected them to the pleasures they experienced while exercising. For example, our

participants recounted the pleasures of feeling the *touch* of wind in their hair and against their skin when walking outdoors. They described the excitement and satisfaction associated with the *sound* of a ball or shuttle hitting the sweet spot of a racquet. They also noted the joy of *smelling* a freshly mown golf course or park. Macey (pseudonyms are used throughout) exemplified sensual pleasure as she recounted what it was like to move across the dance floor with her husband:

Being in such close contact with my husband when we're dancing is wonderful. I always become very aware of his aftershave and I always like to wear nice perfume.

(Macey, Ball Room dancing, Age 77)

Likewise, in her descriptions of what it was like to swim, Martha highlighted how it was the *touch* of the water against her body, encountered via the sensations of movement (gliding) pressure (floating) and temperature, that facilitated experiences of sensual pleasure:

I love to feel the water as I glide through it, cold at first then pleasantly cool as my body heats up from the exercise. There is a great sense of freedom and buoyancy when you can just float lazily in the deeper end and a sense of achievement when I reach the goals I set myself, for example number of lengths, different strokes, and trying to breathe properly, I don't really like my face in the water all of the time, but feel great when I do breathe correctly, and feel the increase in speed and efficiency

as I glide through the water. Then of course, there is the pleasure of a hot soapy shower and a nice soft towel to dry myself.

(Martha, Swimming, Age 63)

Sensory pleasure within the context of physical activity has previously been described as feelings of 'flow', and the 'feeling' of one's body responding to the physiological demands placed upon it (Wright & Dewar, 1997). This was further developed upon in the current research. Specifically, our analysis also revealed how sensual pleasure was experienced as instant gratification, encountered *in the present* and bounded by the episodes of time, along with the spaces and places in which the activity took place. In some instances, this expanded to include the immediate aftermath of the activity (e.g., showering, dismounting). Sensual pleasure, therefore, was not always confined to the time and space in which the activity was executed.

Like the carnal pleasures outlined by Coveney and Bunton (2003), sensual pleasures connect the body to the world. These authors explain how carnal pleasures 'opened up' the body to the influence of other people and the surrounding environment. Connecting with one's environment through the senses was also evident in our analysis and was exemplified by cyclist Richard, as he described what the beginning of a ride felt like:

The first kilometers are mixed, the body objects, the saddle feels hard and my legs struggle to find a rhythm. From where I live at sea level, the only way is up and soon my body demands more from my heart and lungs. Then I notice an "it's OK" signal. The heart has responded and there is no pain, I jump out of the saddle and

“dance” on the pedals, shifting my weight and maneuvering the bike easily. There is a tremendous sense of pleasure as your body does what you expect, the bike speeds up and the ride has really begun.

(Richard, Cycling, Age 60)

Richard’s comments indicate the intimate connection between his sensual body and the surrounding landscape. The demands to pedal uphill that feature at the beginning of each ride (given his starting point of sea-level) shape the nature and timing of the sensual pleasures (or indeed displeasures) that he encounters. This observation resonates with Shilling’s (2008) discussion of the dynamic relationship between the external and internal environments of human action. Citing the work of Dewey (1980) and Mead (1903) on Pragmatism, Shilling notes how the sensory subject actively engages with, and is also ‘called out’ by, the external environment. The human senses, therefore, extend from the individual to the environment, enabling individuals to unfold onto, connect in particular ways, and gain information from the environment. Similarly, the notion of sensual pleasure lends support to scholars calling for a move beyond the notion of embodiment and towards a paradigm of emplacement (Howes, 2005; Pink, 2011), which takes seriously the sensuous interrelationship between body-mind-environment.

Adding a further dimension to this, Richard’s comments illuminate how the body’s senses – which shaped and framed the sensual pleasures of physical activity - connected the body with technology. Namely, sporting equipment. For Richard, this connection was experienced and expressed in relation to the touch (pressure) of the hard saddle against his legs and the peddles beneath his feet. Of significance, our participants did not necessarily experience sensual pleasures as a constant throughout their entire exercise experience. Legs struggled, rhythm (and flow) alluded, and equipment felt uncomfortable. In this sense,

sensual pleasure took the form of spatiotemporal moments that were peppered throughout the activity.

### ***Documented Pleasures***

A second type of pleasure identified from our analysis stemmed from the process and outcome of documenting one's activity. As examples, this involved producing written accounts of walking routes, diaries of sailing or trekking adventures, the production of news items for community magazines (e.g., reporting competition results, short pieces outlining individual experiences of a local fitness class). The notion of documented pleasure shares similarities with what Coveney and Bunton (2003) term 'disciplined' or 'deferred' pleasure. These authors note how the categorization of what and how things can please – through the creation of archives, manuals and catalogues – can allow for a vicarious experience of pleasurable acts. Documented pleasure, however, develops Coveney and Bunton's descriptions of disciplined and deferred pleasures in new ways, by highlighting its spatiotemporal dimensions.

Unlike sensual pleasures, which facilitated feelings of instant gratification and were experienced in the present, documented pleasure was encountered after the moment of *doing* activity itself. In this sense, documented pleasure had the potential to expand the experience of being active into time periods that existed in between episodes of exercise. Thus, this type of pleasure enabled those who encountered it to make connections with the time tense of *past in the present* (Roberts, 1999). Living in this temporal orientation involved bringing previous exercise occasions into present understandings of the body in time. John demonstrated an example of documented pleasure as he talked through his training logbook, which he had brought voluntarily to the interview. Leafing through the pile of



individual A4 sheets, clamped together with a rusting bulldog clip, he began to point and explain:

This morning, I was 12 stone 11.8 pounds. On this day in 1996, I was 12 stone 10, that was my best, that was my peak really. I was doing 8.63-minute-miles in those days and I weighed 12.11 and that was my log you see. OK (turns pages), this was May, so I had done the marathon, so I was just having an easy sort of... 4 ½ miler, 4 ½ miler, gym session, squash session, 4.3 miler, squash again (points to various entries). So I did 13 miles, gym session and two squash sessions. Last week, what did I do? 1,2,3,4 running sessions and a spinning class, you know, static bikes. I was 12 stone, 13.4 pounds ... I've been keeping this log since 1996. It's an enjoyable part of things, to see what I've been doing and what's happened over the years.

(John, Running, Age 72)

The time tense of past in the present, represented a key feature of documented pleasure. As shown in the above comments, it enabled the pleasure of the activity to extend beyond the here and now, by seeping into a current (and presumably future) timescape. Accordingly, documented pleasure had the potential to expand the experience of being physically active beyond the spaces where it took place (e.g., a swimming pool, a running route, a dance hall) and into a place where the actual documenting occurred. This possibility for the experience of pleasure to be shifted from the time and space of the activity per se, to a different point in time and location was an important function of documented pleasure, which had the capacity to broaden the definition of what 'enjoying

physical activity' might mean. That is, as something which placed less emphasis on the enactment of being physical, and a greater focus on peripheral undertakings. This component of documented pleasure was further highlighted when Rose described her involvement in footpath walking:

I've always had a tremendous interest in the footpaths. I mean from the days when we were trying to find what was shown on a map, trying to find that on the ground, and fascinating how it's altered, and having done a considerable number of different publications of self-guided walks ... Amongst my greater pleasures is enabling others to enjoy walking in the countryside, from the production of 'self-guided' walk descriptions.

(Rose, Walking, Age 72)

Like sensual pleasure, documented pleasure could also emphasise the interrelated nature between body-mind-environment through the creation of material pertaining to physical activity. In addition, as Rose's comments suggest, documented pleasure had the capacity to connect individuals with *other* bodies. This could be one's former or future body, but it could also be the body of another who might themselves act upon the experience that had been documented. In this respect, it might also be argued that the authors of such documents not only enjoyed writing and recording their activities but they also enjoyed being 'read' by others and sharing their knowledge. These interpretations open up the possibility of documented pleasure being bound up with the desire to experience an aging identity that is knowledgeable, productive and capable – a "busy body" (Katz, 2000) - rather than dependent, in decline and unproductive in an ageist society.

### ***The Pleasure of Habitual Action***

Another type of pleasure our participants derived from the implementation of, and adherence to, habitual behavior that regular involvement in physical activity could facilitate. Similar to documented pleasure, it was not necessarily the experience of physicality itself that evoked a sense of pleasure (as was the case for sensual pleasure). Nor were experiences of this type of pleasure tied to spaces in which the activity took place. Rather, feelings of pleasure were evoked by the habit of doing the activity, and the “agentic field of action” that was enlarged as a result (Shilling, 2008, p.13).

Habit provided a sense of structure and purpose to everyday life. This seemed especially important in the aftermath of life changing events such as retirement. In this context, routinized behavior seemed to provide the participants with feelings of control (albeit an illusion of control) over a (new) life, where the expanse of unallocated time could be overwhelming. Describing the role of physical activity in her life, Jemima’s comments drew attention to the pleasures of habitual continuity:

[Physical activity] it’s just a part of life. It’s just what I do, like some people get up and clean their teeth and it’s part of a routine. I’m not one for routines but I think when you finish work you’ve got to get some sort of routine otherwise I imagine you get very depressed and go downhill. So physical activity gives me a structure and I know exactly what happens through the week, which I like.

(Jemima, Fitness Classes, Age 61)

Jemima's comments point to the pleasures of balancing everyday life within the context of retirement through the accomplishment of routinized physical activity. Habitual action is associated with a balance in the relationship between one's social and physical environment, biological need and bodily potentialities. It involves embodied subjects realizing routinized modes of behavior that in turn, might connect them to, and facilitate the management of their surroundings and their bodies (Shilling, 2008). Shilling asserts that habitual continuity is essential in order for humans to operate effectively.

For some of the participants, the pleasure of habitual action was connected to the contribution that routinized physical activity made to the development of what Frank (1995) terms a *disciplined body*. At times of social and physical change (e.g., retirement, entry into grandparenthood, illness), the disciplined body responds by attempting to regain a sense of predictability and control through the implementation of strict bodily regimes. The importance of disciplining the flesh – as a driver and outcome of habitual behavior – was often discussed in relation to episodes of waning motivation. Illuminating how this was intimately connected to one's physical environment, Gilbert's account of the impact that bad weather has on his motivation to be active was especially noteworthy:

It really is the case that it makes you feel better. I mean, I do have to force myself to get out on the bike sometimes. Quite often I'll say 'oh, it's not very nice weather and it's blowing a bit', you know. But then I think 'there is no real excuse, you've got to'. So I get changed and I always come back feeling so much better and so glad that I did it.

(Gilbert, Cycling, Age 71)

Also recounting strategies for upholding habitual action, and the pleasure that ensued as a result, Dominic recalled:

It's purely that I feel it's [T'ai Chi] better for me ... Some mornings you wake up and you think 'oh, I feel a bit grotty this morning', you know. And I think no, once you've missed it once, the temptation is to say every time I feel a bit grotty, that I won't do it. And in fact, I always feel great afterwards, I feel absolutely wonderful afterwards and then I feel happy that I made myself go.

(Dominic, T'ai Chi, Age 78)

This sequential scenario of waning motivation, followed by the act of overcoming, helped to construct what Brockmeier (2000) refers to as *cyclical time* by depicting pleasure through habitual action as if it were a repetitive structure. While Brockmeier acknowledges that in 'real time' there is no identical repetition (i.e., there may be different reasons for not wanting to exercise, and 'making' oneself exercise at different times), this model offers a particular vision of the course and direction of time that, in turn, helped frame and structure pleasurable experiences.

While participants may have gained pleasure from the habitual continuity of this cyclical occurrence, Throsby (2013) problematizes embodied pleasures that are derived from the domain of challenge and overcoming. For her, it can draw the focus towards sensory deprivation and in some instances, bodily suffering at the expense of embodied pleasures of physicality. The mantra of "mind over matter", Throsby argues, while useful in initiating and perhaps maintaining certain (habituated) health behaviours, can also

dissociate mind from body and reduce the body's capacity to engage with the activity in such a way that it becomes an end in itself, rather than (or as well as) a means to an end.

The extent to which these cautions apply to the participants in this study are unclear given their simultaneous accounts of sensual pleasure (discussed earlier). In addition, it would seem that a key dimension of 'overcoming' that enabled participants to experience pleasure through habitual action related to the 'feelings' that exercise induced. Through this repetitive process that provided cyclical pleasures of habituated continuity, many of the participants had learned that being physically active changed the way that the body *feels*. This marks, for Throsby, a shift towards a heightened kinaesthesia, whereby rather than depriving senses and detaching body from mind (as per 'mind over matter'), a more positive, sensorially enhanced space is opened.

### ***The Pleasure of Immersion***

This bringing together of body and mind was also evident in the fourth type of pleasure that was identified in our analysis. Here, participants experienced pleasure from a sense of focus that enabled them to consider, escape from and / or gain perspective on, issues demanding attention in their everyday life. Immersion within their activity was, therefore, an affectively transformative experience (Throsby, 2013) and participants reported an improved sense of wellbeing as a result. For example, when describing her experience of doing yoga, Deetria said:

It is a mind body thing. I love it and I feel afterwards, if I've gone into yoga having a hundred things [on my mind], thinking 'oh gosh', you know 'I've got to do this' or

worrying about that, or whatever. I find that the two hours that I'm there, you just concentrate totally on what you're doing. Some people say it's a spiritual thing. I don't feel that, but I do find it, it adds to my wellbeing, how I feel. Because after I've had a yoga session, all these things I've been worrying about, because I've spent two hours just concentrating on what I'm doing in my yoga, they seem to, well they're not so important in life anymore.

(Deetria, Yoga, Age 70)

Immersion in one's activity required a focus of body and mind that was often achieved through movement. This allowed the participants to detach themselves from existing pre-occupations. In this sense, like sensual pleasure, pleasure through immersion was at its most heightened 'in the moment' of doing the activity. That said, as Deetria's comments indicate, like documented pleasure, the transformative affect encountered from immersion (i.e., regaining perspective on worries) had the potential to extend beyond the completion of the activity.

The notion of detachment that was embedded within this form of pleasure did not only relate to daily concerns. For some of the older adults, it also referred to people. Immersion provided a route to 'me time' by allowing a sense of identity detached from others (Throsby, 2013). Colin exemplified this as he described his passion for hill walking:

...It's just so good doing it, I just love it because it's totally committing. You're in the middle of nowhere and you're on your own ... I like the feeling that you've got to do it right, you know, the navigation matters, it's a matter of survival really, you've got to do it right. It keeps you incredibly focused. I like that, I like having something I can

really focus on. I really enjoy just getting away completely from everything. I mean on that trip (Scottish Highlands), I had a wonderful 42-hour period where I did not see another person – wonderful.

(Colin, Hill walking, Age 69)

These comments draw attention to the importance of detaching from people that was described by some of the participants gaining pleasure through immersion in their activity. Yet in the process of *detaching* (from everyday concerns and / or people), pleasure through immersion was often achieved by an *attachment* to place. Immersion required individuals to lose themselves in a place. These places were varied and specific to the activity. As illustrated above, for some they were vast areas of wilderness demanding a focus on navigation and survival. For others, such as Josey, the pleasurable place in which one became immersed was imaginary:

What is it like to do Zumba [a form of dance exercise class]? Great! It makes you feel happy, if you are worried about anything, or if anything is on your mind, you forget about it for an hour and just get sucked into the music. When the Caribbean music comes on our instructor says we're on a lovely desert island dancing the night away; Burlesque, you feel sexy; Irish dancing; you imagine you are in River Dance with Michael Flatley. Not much more to say than that, other than it is a tonic, much better than pills.

(Josey, Dance exercise class (Zumba), Age 65)

Josey's sentiments echo some of Hoyez's (2007) suggestions regarding the practice of yoga having the potential to connect its participants to therapeutic landscapes.



Therapeutic landscapes, linked to a collective activity such as yoga are balanced between realities and idealities, and also experiences and discourses about places. Josey's comments signal how the presence of music enabled a re-appropriation of place and landscape. Moreover, these places and landscapes facilitated a sense of well-being and pleasure.

Pleasure through immersion has similarities with certain aspects of ecstatic pleasure. Though previously associated with youth club culture and the consumption of recreational drugs, Coveny and Bunton (2003) suggest that ecstatic pleasure can arise from ritualistic, spiritually bonding experiences, including rhythmic dance. Moreover, they assert that these forms of embodied social life can offer "liberation, pleasure and communality – even offering alternative spiritual realms" (p. 173). For the physically active older adults, pleasure through immersion was associated with health enhancing, rather than health threatening behaviours. The pleasures of getting "sucked into" music played at an exercise or dance class, losing oneself in 'the form' (sequence of movements in T'ai Chi), and finding stillness through pranayama (breath control) in yoga, were all techniques by which participants reported becoming immersed in their activities. Moreover, it seemed that in some instances, these techniques facilitated the experiences of bonding, spirituality, liberation (from the concerns of everyday life), and sense of community.

INSERT TABLE 2 APPROXIMATELY HERE

## Reflections

Pleasure remains an under-theorized and under-researched area in relation to health, embodiment and physical activity in older age. These significant knowledge gaps were addressed here. Informed by narrative theory, the analyses of qualitative data highlighted the significance and complexity of pleasure in the lives of older adults as they negotiate constructions of aging embodiment within the context of physical activity. We demonstrated how pleasure is not a singular, uni-dimensional concept, but can be experienced as different 'types' (e.g., sensual, documented, habitual, immersion) in, with, and through the body. Moreover, we have shown how pleasures are encountered across various temporalities and spaces, in some instances beyond those of where and when the activity was executed. It is suggested that when we talk about the pleasures of physical activity in older age, we not only need to talk about this experience in the plural and in time and space sensitive ways, but also stress that pleasures are embodied.

Building upon other examples in this modest area of scholarship (e.g. Dionigi, 2010; Sandberg, 2013; Phoenix & Sparkes, 2009; Trethewey, 2001; Tulle, 2008), the experiences of pleasures outlined here contribute to new cultural narratives and embodied practices that challenge an aging corporeality defined by illness, infirmity and management by others. This shift in how the body is conceptualized and encountered reflects characteristics outlined by Featherstone (1982) in his discussion of the body in consumer culture where the appearance and ability of the body take on increasing importance. While the production of pleasurable experiences through physical activity seemed disconnected from the appearance of the body, it could be argued that for some participants (consciously or not), their commitment to a physically active life style was partly informed by a need to embody an ageing identity which 'appeared' to youthfully trouble the corporeality of growing old. In many respects, then, the participant's stories of pleasure as told with and through their ageing bodies reflect what Gilleard and Higgs (2013) term 'new ageing'.

According to Gilleard and Higgs (2013), approaches to the 'new ageing' differ from those, which throughout modernity largely emptied the ageing body of any other meaning aside health and social care. For them, the new ageing body is as much about "possibility as well as constraint, the site for new practices and new freedoms as much, if not more than, for old vulnerabilities" (p. 20). Our paper illustrates these claims with empirical evidence by showing how, for some older adults, physical activity provides opportunities for the possibilities of pleasures and freedom to be realized through the body. In some instances, this was despite constraints imposed by the body's corporeality. Indeed, as noted earlier many of our participants – though leading physically active lifestyles - were simultaneously living with some form of chronic illness. Thus, the typology of pleasures constructed here goes some way to presenting a sufficiently multi-layered framework for storying what aging well might mean within the context of later life physical activity (Andrews, 2009). While the body is, of course storied and lived, none of this is to ignore that the body is a biological entity and that the corporeality of the aging process can also constrain pleasures. Nor is it to champion heroic narratives of those whose might appear to be "growing older without aging" (Katz, 2001, p. 27). This paper, however, focuses on the theoretical and empirical development of pleasures that can be generated in and through the *non-elite* ageing body (see also Phoenix & Sparkes, 2009) and the manner in which those particular bodies can become both source and location of that pleasure (Shilling, 2008).

In addition to pleasures being embodied and a useful empirical example that illuminates 'aging well', it should also be noted that pleasures are constituted relationally, through the stories culture and human relationships supply. For example, like Crossley (2011), Burkitt (2012) explains how emotion is not something that is reflected upon in a disengaged way. Rather, it is central to the way people in social relations relate to one

another: “it is woven into the fabric of the interactions we are *engaged* in and it is therefore also central to the way we relate to ourselves as well as to others” (p. 459). Also emphasizing the how pleasures are constituted relationally, Gergen (2009) argues how it is less the case that people *feel* emotions, so much as *do* them, and that this doing is only comprehensible within a particular tradition of relationship. Emotions such as happiness, joy, amusement and tranquility that we might typically associate with feelings of pleasure are, for Gergen, “created in co-action” whereby actions become identified as emotions in part through the use of word (p.99). Rather than viewing feelings and emotions as isolated phenomena within the individual, this stance situates emotional life as a narrative construction, the complexities of which being best understood through the embodied narrative constructions and reconstructions of the principle social actors; that is, the participants (Sarbin, 2001). For Sarbin, actions traditionally subsumed under the term ‘emotion’ (e.g. those associated with pleasure – happiness, joy, fun, sensuality, amusement, tranquility etc.) are the names of narrative plots. One is not, he argues, passively gripped by a particular emotion, but rather agentically grips a narrative plot about being happy, finding an activity fun, experiencing tranquility, and so forth. Thus, when examining and theorizing pleasure we cannot ignore how pleasures are embodied, relational and narratively constituted.

Highlighting the relational and narrative dimension of pleasure brings to the fore new ways of theorizing a topic, which has often been contained within the somewhat distant and observable parameters of the individual body. However, we should be cautious of reducing experiences of pleasures to narrative alone. After all, within the natural sciences, discussions are taking place regarding the extent to which ones enjoyment of physical activity are genetically determined (see de Geus & de Moor, 2011, cited in Bauman, Reis, Sallis et al., 2012). Within the social sciences, as part of the *affective turn* (Clough & Halley,

2007), Cromby (2011) questions the suitability of qualitative investigations informed by a linguistic epistemology to examine embodied, affective phenomena. For him, affective phenomena are known corporeally *before* they are identifiable through narrative. In this sense, it follows that participant's descriptions of pleasure (particularly sensory pleasures) are already at one removed from its occurrence (see also Shilling, 2003). Having acknowledged this tension, one might also argue that somewhat ineffable forms of experience must at some point be transformed if we are to make meaning and communicate them in intelligible ways to other. According to Frank (2010), although conventional understanding follows that individuals have experiences, *and then* tell stories that represent those experiences, this temporality can be reversed to put the story *before* the experience. Drawing from the work of Mattingly (1998), he proposes that there is no reality without narrative and that it is because we have stories that we are able to believe we are having experiences. Experience is, therefore, nothing more than an enactment of pre-given stories: "What people know as experience hitches a ride on stories those people know; the stories shape what becomes the experience" (p. 22). From this perspective, it is the stories already circulating within society regarding, for example, the positive associations with feeling the burn ("no pain, no gain"), the value of productivity in older age, the efficiency of routine, and escapism as something luxurious to be savoured, that enable sensory, documented, habitual and immersive pleasures to be experienced and that experience given meaning.

In addition to contributing to knowledge, important practical implications also emerge from this work. Exploring the embodied pleasures of physical activity amongst older adults provides original insight into a population who, while present within health policy, are generally referred to in terms of the health-related outcomes associated with a physically active lifestyle in older age and / or the social and physical barriers that might impinge on

participation. In addition to these concerns, we would advocate policy makers and practitioners tasked with promoting regular engagement in physical activity amongst older adults look beyond the “usual suspects” (e.g. reducing risk of type II diabetes, coronary heart disease, obesity etc.) and bring the notion of pleasure into the foreground of policy making. This would involve talking of pleasure in the plural and offering a variety of narratives about the potential pleasures of physical activity that incorporate the different places, temporalities and relationships in which it can be experienced. This strategy could be a useful means of narratively ambushing (Frank, 2010) or interpellating different people who may have already foreclosed their identities from incorporating a physically active self. We are not arguing here that all older adults *should* be active as they age, but instead ensuring that for those who may wish to explore the possibilities of an active older age, that a variety of narrative resources are in place for them to draw upon should they choose. Having an awareness of, and the access to a multiplicity of narratives in later life is (aside from those emphasizing decline and disengagement), is, of course, a key component for aging well (Randall & McKim, 2008).

All of this, however, is not to suggest that the pursuit of pleasure is a panacea for all ills associated with physical inactivity in older age. A number of scholars have noted the limitations of pleasure and these critiques provide useful cautions for simplistic celebrations about the relationship between pleasure and health-seeking behaviours. For example, like those in Wright and Dewar’s (1997) study, for some of our participants, the pleasures now found in physical activity had often been preceded by negative and alienating experiences “leaving residues which continue to colour their relationship with their bodies in physical activity” (p. 93). We should not neglect the fact that when addressing physical activity in relation to ageing, this does not simply mean focusing on adults over the age of 60. It means focusing upon people’s encounters with physical activity across the life course.

Twietmeyer (2012) notes a further limitation of pleasure, arguing that the possibilities of gaining pleasure from a physical activity setting are generally only open to those who have mastered the skills necessary to take advantage of the opportunities they provide. Skills are not simply learned, he reminds us, but *taught*. Thus, finding pleasure in physical activity is culturally dependent and will subsequently depend on what virtues and values are nurtured and possessed within our communities. Access to the pleasures that can be encountered through physical activity are always mediated by material, environmental and social constraints (Cerin & Leslie, 2008; Haughton McNeill, Kreuter & Subramanian, 2006). In instances where health educators overlook over such complex social realities issues, individuals who may otherwise have been receptive are unlikely to engage (Monaghan, 2001). These limitations noted, we contend that within a policy context dominated by health outcomes, pleasure has remained a forgotten dimension of physical activity in older age. Our typology outlines four ideals (i.e., sensual, documented, habit, immersion) that could be heard within the narratives of the ‘already active’ older adults participating in our research. It is hoped that future research can draw upon these types to further enhance our understanding of the relationship between pleasure, physical activity and aging in new and nuanced ways.

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	Swimming	Dance	Keep fit class / Gym	Walking	Tai Chi / Yoga	Tennis/ Badminton	Running	Sea swimming / Surfing	Cycling	Bowls	Rowing	Golf	Total
<b>Male</b>													
<b>60 - 69</b>	3		2	3		1			1		1		<b>11</b>
<b>70 - 79</b>			2	1	1	1	1		1	1	1	1	<b>10</b>
<b>80 - 89</b>							2						<b>2</b>
<b>Female</b>													
<b>60 - 69</b>	4	2	1		1			1		1	1	1	<b>12</b>
<b>70 - 79</b>		2	4	1	3	1		1					<b>12</b>
<b>80 - 89</b>	1		2										<b>3</b>
<b>90 - 95</b>	1												<b>1</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>51</b>

Table 1: Breakdown of sample, including gender, age and activity.

	<b>Sensual</b>	<b>Documented</b>	<b>Habitual Action</b>	<b>Immersion</b>
<b>Source of pleasure</b>	Sensory experiences.	Process of documenting activity.	Implementation of and adherence to habitual	Sense of focus, which facilitates escape from,



			behavior.	consideration of and perspective to be gained upon everyday life demands.
<b>When is pleasure experienced?</b> <b>(Time)</b>	Instant gratification in the moment of doing the activity.  Moments of sensual pleasure ‘peppered’ throughout activity (i.e., not necessarily constant).	After doing the activity.	During the cyclical rhythm of routine (of which physical activity forms a part of).	In the moment of doing the activity.  Benefits recognized as extending beyond that moment.
<b>Where is pleasure experienced?</b> <b>(Space)</b>	Where the activity occurs.	Beyond the space where the activity occurs.	Beyond the space where the activity occurs.	Where the activity occurs (including real or imagined therapeutic landscapes).  Benefits recognized as extending beyond that

				space and into everyday life.
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Table 2: Typology of Pleasure

## **Pleasure: A Forgotten Dimension of Physical Activity in Older Age**

### **Highlights:**

- Pleasure is an under-researched and under-theorized concept.
- A typology of pleasure for physical activity in older age is constructed.
- Four ideal types of pleasure are outlined including the role of space and time.
- Understanding pleasure provides additional avenues for physical activity promotion.
- These go beyond dominant performance and health outcomes.